

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- After clearing a number of legislative process hurdles, Congressman Jeff Fortenberry's Help Haitian Adoptees Immediately to Integrate Act of 2010 (H.R. 5283), also known as the Help HAITI Act, was passed by Congress this afternoon. This legislation, which would normalize the adoption process for more than 1,000 Haitian orphans pending adoption by American families, originally passed the House of Representatives on July 20, 2010. It then was amended and passed by the Senate on August 4, 2010. The measure will now be sent to the President to be signed into law.

"I am pleased that the House and Senate have finally acted to give vulnerable Haitian orphans and their adoptive American families, who have endured so much heartbreak and tragedy, the comfort of knowing that their children's legal status is in good order," said Fortenberry. "This measure will benefit new families from Nebraska and across the United States, and I eagerly await the President's signature."

The tragic earthquake of January 12, 2010, upended the normal process for international adoptions in Haiti, endangering the futures of more than 1,000 children pending adoption. Though these children were swiftly evacuated to join their adoptive American families, their immigration status remained in limbo, leaving them with fewer legal protections, potentially ineligible for critical resources, and at risk of being returned to Haiti. Working with the Department of Homeland Security's United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), Fortenberry introduced a legislative fix to allow their adoptive U.S. families to apply immediately on their behalves to become legal permanent residents and eventually qualify for citizenship. The Help HAITI Act would also help to minimize the staff, monetary and other resource demands on USCIS.

Fortenberry is a Member of the House Democracy Partnership, a bipartisan 20-member commission established by the U.S. House of Representatives in 2005 to support the development of independent democratic legislatures. The House Democracy Partnership and the Haitian Parliament developed a relationship following Haiti's 2006 elections in helping to strengthen Haiti's legislative body. Fortenberry had earlier urged the Partnership to include Haiti among the select group of 14 partner countries, and has continued to work with Haitian parliamentarians, particularly on matters of oversight and government reform and agricultural assistance. He joined a congressional election monitoring delegation in Haiti for the November 28 elections.

Fortenberry is also a member of the House Foreign Affairs and Oversight and Government

Reform Committees.

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